

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON. SAMUEL NARTEY GEORGE, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATION, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATIONS, AT THE 25TH SILVER JUBILEE EDITION OF THE CONNECTED BANKING SUMMIT & INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE AWARDS HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY 2026, ACCRA, GHANA

**Chairperson,
Distinguished Participants,
Esteemed Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocols duly observed**

It is an honour to join you this morning as Guest of Honour at the 25th Silver Jubilee Edition of the Connected Banking Summit and Innovation and Excellence Awards. I thank the International Centre for Strategic Alliances for the invitation and, more importantly, for sustaining this platform for twenty-five years. Longevity like this does not happen by chance. It reflects relevance, credibility, and the ability to evolve with changing times.

It is also fitting that this milestone edition is taking place here in Accra. Ghana has played, and continues to play, a significant role in Africa's financial and digital journey. From financial sector reforms to mobile money leadership and regulatory innovation, our country has often served as a testing ground for ideas that later scale across the continent.

Today, under the leadership of His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, Ghana is entering a renewed phase of national development. This phase is grounded in a clear understanding that digital transformation is no longer optional. Technology must be deliberately aligned with economic sovereignty, social inclusion, and national resilience. The Government of Ghana is firm in its belief that digitalisation must work for all and that innovation must lead to real improvements in the daily lives of our people.

The banking and financial services sector sits at the very centre of this transformation. Finance is the bloodstream of development in any economy. When finance is weak, fragmented, or exclusionary, growth slows. When it is resilient, well governed, and inclusive, opportunity expands.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as we talk about next-generation finance, we must be honest with ourselves. The future of banking in West Africa will not be secured by legacy systems with cosmetic upgrades. It will not be secured by innovation that prioritises speed over stability, or profit over trust. A financial system that lacks resilience will fail under pressure. One that cannot scale will leave too many people behind. And one that is not customer-centric will eventually lose legitimacy. Trust, in the end, remains the true currency of banking.

Next-generation finance, therefore, is not simply about faster payments or smarter applications. It is about rethinking the logic of finance itself. It requires us to ask difficult but necessary questions: who does the system truly serve? Who controls the infrastructure and the data? And who ultimately benefits when innovation scales?

If our financial systems do not deliberately include small businesses, women, young people, farmers, informal sector operators, and first-time users of formal finance, then we are not building the future. We are simply digitising old inequalities.

One important lesson Ghana has learned is that strong private innovation depends on strong public digital infrastructure. Secure digital identity systems, interoperable payment platforms,

trusted data governance frameworks, and clear regulatory rules are the foundations that make innovation sustainable. They reduce risk, build confidence, and create a level playing field.

This is why, under the Mahama administration, we are reaffirming our commitment to building digital public infrastructure that supports competition, protects consumers, and strengthens national capacity. Initiatives such as the **Data Exchange Hub** are central to this vision, enabling secure and seamless data sharing across institutions while safeguarding privacy. Likewise, the forthcoming **Data Harmonization Bill** will ensure consistency, trust, and accountability in how data is managed across the financial ecosystem.

Regulation, in this context, must be properly understood. Regulation is not the enemy of innovation; poor regulation is. In today's financial landscape, smart, adaptive, and forward-looking regulation is a strategic asset. Jurisdictions that protect consumers, secure data, enforce accountability, and preserve systemic stability are the ones that attract long-term investment and credible partnerships.

Regulatory arbitrage may offer short-term advantages, but it always comes with long-term costs, costs that are often paid by citizens and taxpayers. Our responsibility, therefore, is to ensure that regulation evolves alongside innovation, not behind it.

As finance becomes more digital, it also becomes more vulnerable. Cybersecurity is no longer just an IT issue; it is an economic security issue. Data is no longer only a commercial asset; it is a strategic national resource. A single breach in one institution can quickly cascade across an entire financial system, eroding trust in a matter of hours.

This reality calls for stronger data protection regimes, greater local cybersecurity capacity, clear rules on cross-border data flows, and deeper regional cooperation on digital risk management. Financial resilience in West Africa cannot be built in isolation. It must be collective, coordinated, and forward-looking.

At the heart of all of this is the human being. Technology does not automatically create inclusion; policy choices do. If innovation does not reduce the cost of credit, shorten the distance to financial services, improve access for SMEs, and empower the informal sector, then it has failed its most basic test.

Customer-centric banking in West Africa must reflect the lived realities of our people. It must speak to traders in our markets, farmers in rural communities, young entrepreneurs building digital startups, and families seeking dignity and security through access to finance.

No single country can build a globally competitive financial ecosystem on its own. Regional interoperability, regulatory dialogue, and shared infrastructure are no longer aspirations; they are necessities. Finance must become a bridge to West African integration, not a barrier.

As we mark twenty-five years of the Connected Banking Summit, this moment calls for more than reflection. It calls for recommitment. A recommitment to building financial systems that are resilient by design, scalable with purpose, and grounded in trust. We must scale innovation without sacrificing sovereignty, accountability, or inclusion.

The future of banking in West Africa will not be shaped by technology alone. It will be shaped by values, governance, and the courage to make the right choices, even when those choices are difficult.

I commend the International Centre for Strategic Alliances for convening this milestone edition and for recognising excellence across the financial ecosystem. May this summit deliver commitments, collaborations and lasting impact.

Ghana stands ready, under the leadership of His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, to work with all stakeholders to build a secure, inclusive, and future-ready financial ecosystem for West Africa.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you productive and meaningful deliberations.

God bless you.

God bless West Africa.

And God bless our shared future.